

REMARKS

Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of the present application in view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks.

Applicants acknowledge that the Examiner considers claim 23 to contain allowable subject matter. As suggested by the Examiner, Applicants have rewritten claim 23 in independent form to include all of the limitations of its base claim (claim 1) and any intervening claims (claims 20 and 22). Claims 1-22 and 24-34 have been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer, leaving allowable claim 23 as the only claim pending in this application. No new matter has been added.

Claims 1-22 and 24-34 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over U.S. Patent No. 6,555,544 ("the Francois patent"). Applicants do not concede the propriety of this rejection or the positions taken by the Examiner regarding the Francois patent. In order to expedite allowance of the application, Applicants have cancelled claims 1-22 and 24-34, rendering the § 103(a) rejection moot.

Applicants respectfully submit that the present application is in condition for allowance and request its favorable consideration and early passage to issue.

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Respectfully submitted,

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